

**MULTICAST DISTRIBUTION OF PRESENCE INFORMATION
FOR AN INSTANT MESSAGING SYSTEM**

ABSTRACT OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is a system, method and network (110) for multicast
5 distribution of presence information to a plurality of communication devices (102,
104, 106, 108). A contact list (122, 124, 126, 128), associated with each
communication device, identifies one or more of the other communication devices.
The network provides one or more multicast addresses based on the contact lists of
the communication devices to the plurality of communication devices. The network
10 also sends multicast messages identified by the one or more multicast addresses to the
plurality of communication devices. Each multicast address identifies a group of
multicast devices among the plurality of communication devices, and the multicast
messages include presence information about the group of multicast devices. A
portion of the plurality of communication devices receives the multicast messages
15 identified by the one or more multicast addresses and extracts the presence
information about the group of multicast devices from the multicast messages.